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THE BOSTON TRADITION

A JUBILEE 350 EXHIBIT

May 1980 at City Hall Gallery

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Alfred North Whitehead, the British philosopher, observed in 1942 that Boston was more than just a major cultural center. In the 20th century, he wrote, it had come to occupy a position similar to that of Paris in the Middle Ages; Boston had become in the modern period the "capital city" of Western learning. One remembers Emerson's announcement of nearly a century earlier: "I do not speak with any fondness, but the language of coldest history, when I say that Boston commands the attention as the town which was appointed in the destiny of nations to lead the civilization of North America." It is tempting to see Whitehead's observation as evidence of the fulfillment of Emerson's prediction.

Defining learning and culture in the broadest sense, nothing could thus be more timely on the occasion of the 350th anniversary of the founding of the city than to try to discover to what extent over its long history Boston has, in fact, come to hold the great place in western history assigned to it by Whitehead and foreseen by Emerson. The Boston Tradition, an exhibition co-sponsored by the Boston Public Library, the Bostonian Society, the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, and the Boston Atheneum, will seek to do this by identifying the contributions of Bostonians over the last three and a half centuries in twelve major areas of human endeavor:

Art & Literature
Science/Medicine
Business & Finance
Architecture
Religion
Politics and the Law

The Performing Arts
Education
Museums and Collecting
Publishing & the Media
Social Services/Philanthropy
Sport

The design concept of the exhibition will be to combine together twelve smaller exhibits, corresponding to each of the twelve fields, into an overall ensemble. Although dramatic graphics are planned in order to give vitality to the various exhibits, the substance of the exhibition will be a series of between 100 and 150 photographs, each carefully chosen as a striking visual image of some aspect of the Boston Tradition. Many of these

images will be of historic pictures. Most, however, will be new photographs, commissioned by the curator, of distinguished Boston landmarks and personalities.

The impact of the exhibition will be prolonged throughout the Jubilee year in three ways:

1. Each of the twelve exhibits will be separately mounted so as to be able to "travel" throughout the neighborhoods to selected libraries, churches, senior citizen centers, etc.
2. As many as possible of the newly-commissioned photographs will also be printed as postcards, to be sold at the exhibition, separately or in packets for each of the twelve fields of endeavor.
3. A thirty-page booklet/catalogue will also be prepared, including ten to twenty of the most distinguished photographs with an essay by the curator.

I. Art and Literature

Boston writers and artists (sculptors, painters, photographers, etc.) have clearly in varying periods made outstanding contributions to the several fields. Among those artists whose work will probably be featured are John Singer Sargent, Childe Hassam, William Morris Hunt, Maurice Prendergast, Karl Zerbe, and Jack Levine. Boston writers will obviously include Thoreau, Hawthorne, Emerson, Robert and Amy Lowell, David McCord, and John Updike.

II. Science and Medicine

This exhibit will range from M.I.T.'s role in the moon landing to the innovative Museum of Science and will touch on such diverse Boston achievements as the Arnold Arboretum and the Polaroid Corporation as well as "Route 128". Bell, Morse and Edison included. The emphasis will, however, be on medicine -- the great hospitals, medical schools, and leading scientists.

III. Business and Finance

This section will be built around major national, and often pioneering, Boston firms: Gillette, Filenes, Sheraton, United Fruit, First National Bank of Boston, John Hancock, United Shoe, Howard Johnson, as well as the Boston tradition of excellent financial management and investment.

IV. Architecture

In addition to displaying Boston's architectural landmarks, which will also be highlighted in the permanent Jubilee 350 exhibit Place Over Time, created by the Boston Landmarks Commission (opening in September, 1980 at Museum Wharf), this section will also feature landmarks in other American cities designed by Boston architects such as Bullfinch, Isiah Rogers, Richardson, Cram, Gropius and the Architects Collaborative.

V. Religion

The emphasis will be on the six religious traditions indigenous to Boston: Congregationalism, Roman Catholicism, "High Church" Anglicanism, Unitarianism, Universalism, and Christian Science -- several of which either began in Boston or first flowered in the new world here.

VI. Politics and Law

No history of politics and law in this country can ignore Boston. Three United States presidents and several United States Supreme Court justices have been Bostonians; five presidents, moreover, have attended Harvard. Bostonians like John Adams, John Kennedy, and Justice Brandeis will dominate this exhibit, including also such influential contemporary figures as Theodore White and Ted Kennedy. The exhibit will also emphasize the Massachusetts Constitution, the oldest functioning written constitution in the world. This section will tie in to the Forums 350, on the history of Boston politics, to be presented at the Kennedy Library in cooperation with Boston College in September and October of 1980.

VII. The Performing Arts

Obvious points of departure for this exhibit are the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Harvard and Boston Public Library Theatre Collections, the Opera Company of Boston, the New England Conservatory, the Handel & Haydn Society, the Boston Ballet Company, and the Berklee School of Jazz. Leading figures in Boston's musical and theatrical history -- Koussevitsky, B. F. Keith, Sarah Caldwell, Elliot Norton -- will also be featured prominently.

VIII. Education

Boston's nine universities and innumerable colleges and schools constitute the largest and perhaps the preeminent educational center of the western world. Necessarily, this exhibit will itself be the centerpiece of The Boston Tradition.

IX. Museums and Libraries

Throughout the world there are few concentrations of man's treasures to equal Boston's. The focus here, of course, will be on the Museum of Fine Arts, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, and the Fogg Museum, as well as the Boston Public Library and the Boston Athenaeum, and the emphasis will be less on the usual catalogue of masterpieces and more on the research and advancement of ideas they stimulate.

X. Sport

Notable "firsts" seem a particularly appropriate focus here, such as the Oneida Football Club, the first in America, and the first World Series. Obviously, the major teams -- the Red Sox, Celtics, Bruins, Patriots -- and events -- such as the Boston Marathon -- will be featured.

XI. Publishing and the Media

The focus in this exhibit will be on the Boston book publishers (Tichnor and Fields; Little, Brown; Houghton Mifflin; Harvard University Press, etc.); magazines (Atlantic Monthly, Daedalus, etc.); newspapers (The Transcript, The Boston Globe) and other media (Channel 2 and film-makers, for example) that have played a key role in shaping the national culture.

XII. Social Services and Philanthropy

Boston's long tradition of excellence in settlement houses and social service organizations -- such as the first YWCA in the country, the unique Women's Educational and Industrial Union, the strong Boys' Clubs -- will be featured along with the philanthropic tradition epitomized by community foundations like the Permanent Charity Fund and city legacies like the George Robert White Fund. Volunteerism in Boston through organizations like School Volunteers of Boston and the Junior League will also be emphasized.

The official opening of Jubilee 350 on Thursday, May 1, 1980 will encompass the opening of the Jubilee 350 Reception Center at City Hall and the opening of The Boston Tradition exhibit, which will thus be the first major Jubilee 350 event. "The Boston Tradition" is sponsored by The First National Bank of Boston.

